

Guidance

SPS Agreement June 2026

Logistics, hauliers and trade intermediaries: preparing your business

Updated 1 June 2026

Reason for the changes

The UK government is negotiating an agreement with the EU on the trade and movement of plants, plant products, animals, animal products, feed and food. This is called a sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) agreement.

The agreement means Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland will apply certain rules in line with the EU. These arrangements will apply whether or not you trade directly with the EU. It is our intention that the agreement will take effect in mid-2027.

As EU rules change in the future, rules in Great Britain will update too. The UK will contribute to the decision-shaping process on future EU rules that will also apply in Great Britain.

Read more about the benefits in the UK-EU SPS agreement – information for businesses news story.

As negotiations are ongoing, not all details are confirmed at this stage. This includes detailed requirements and the exact timing of when arrangements will change. We recognise that some businesses will take longer to comply and we are committed to working with them to ensure a smooth transition. Further information will be provided following the completion of negotiations.

Why this matters

This is relevant to all businesses and organisations involved in:

- importing between the UK, EU and the rest of the world
- exporting between the UK, EU and the rest of the world
- logistics
- road haulage
- warehousing
- distribution

What this means for logistics, hauliers and customs agents

The agreement aims to provide greater long-term certainty for those involved in importing and exporting SPS goods, by setting up a stable framework for future EU and UK trade and regulation.

The changes are expected to deliver benefits across multiple sectors. For businesses that trade directly with the EU, this includes reduced border paperwork, faster movement of fresh goods, more resilient supply chains and the resumption of trade in products such as seed potatoes, fresh sausages and burgers, and so reopening EU market access.

For EU and UK trade, this should result in:

- fewer (or the removal of) physical SPS inspections.
- smoother movement and so less delays and risk of spoilage
- fewer SPS declarations, simplifying the handling of agrifood consignments

The agreement is not a customs agreement, and so customs controls will remain.

Alignment with EU rules will mean there will be alignment with the EU's approach to checks on rest of world SPS trade.

Understanding potential changes early can help you plan.

What businesses should know at this stage

Organisations and businesses, including logistics, hauliers and customs agents, are encouraged to continue engaging with the process to be ready by mid-2027.

You can do this by keeping informed through opening conversations with customers across your supply chains and other contacts, such as:

- retailers
- farmers
- producers
- suppliers
- trade bodies

At this stage, you are not expected to make detailed changes. You should consider the changes to the requirements and how they could affect your business. The government will provide more detail in summer 2026, including next steps.

What we know now (and what will be confirmed later)

As negotiations with the EU are ongoing, not all details are confirmed at this stage. This information outlines what is known now to help you start planning, with further detail to follow later this year.

Moving goods for importing and exporting (logistics and haulage companies)

The changes under the SPS agreement should deliver clear operational benefits by reducing delays at borders. This will include fewer or removed physical inspections for animal, plant and food products, depending on whether they are low-risk or high-risk.

This should reduce the likelihood of consignments being held at border control posts, helping traffic flow more smoothly and reducing disruption at entry points.

These changes should make supply chains more predictable. Improved reliability supports just-in-time logistics, particularly for chilled and fresh goods where timing is critical. With fewer unexpected checks, businesses can plan movements with greater confidence and consistency.

The SPS agreement is expected to reduce delays and border-related disruption, helping lower operating costs across supply chains. Businesses should see less need for contingency planning, emergency rerouting and extended cold storage while goods await clearance.

The new arrangements are also expected to simplify logistics planning, including making it easier to consolidate mixed loads containing both SPS and non-SPS goods.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in particular may benefit from lower non-tariff barrier costs, as smaller consignments should become easier and more cost-effective to move as part of grouped or mixed loads.

For Northern Ireland, we expect the need for businesses to label goods 'not for EU' to reduce significantly as a result of the future arrangements.

Logistics firms need to ensure that their customers use compliant suppliers and maintain appropriate documentation, as failures in compliance could still trigger checks or disruption despite the overall reduction in controls.

If you transport goods (hauliers)

The SPS agreement will change how you transport goods subject to SPS controls. This includes changes to:

- border processes
- inspection requirements
- how different types of goods can be moved together

You may need to review how you plan and manage consignments, including how mixed loads of SPS and non-SPS goods are handled. Requirements for transporting these goods will continue to apply, and you will need to ensure movements remain compliant.

You will still be responsible for ensuring that all commercial documentation is accurate and complete, including consignment details. Errors or omissions may result in delays or disruption at the border.

You should also ensure that drivers, planners and operational staff understand which goods fall under SPS rules and what requirements apply. Ongoing awareness and training will help you maintain compliance as arrangements change.

Customs agents or intermediaries

The SPS agreement will change how you handle requirements for agrifood consignments. This includes changes to the volume and type of SPS processes you carry out, and how these interact with customs procedures.

You may need to review how you manage SPS declarations, certification and associated processes for consignments. This includes updating how you handle documentation and ensuring that processes remain compliant with the new arrangements.

You may also need to review your internal workflows and IT systems to reflect updated SPS requirements. You should make sure that systems can support any changes to certification processes and data requirements.

Your role may include providing guidance to clients on how to meet SPS requirements and ensuring that consignments are prepared in line with current rules. You should make sure that clients understand which requirements apply and what information is needed to support compliant movements.

Key requirements will continue to apply. You must continue to complete customs declarations and meet rules of origin requirements where applicable. Enforcement powers will remain in place, and you will need to ensure that consignments comply with all relevant requirements.

If you trade outside of the EU or goods travel through the EU

We expect the agreement with the EU to be consistent with our international obligations and have entered negotiations with the EU in full awareness of our international commitments.

Under the agreement, it is expected that Great Britain will align with the EU's third country import rules. As now, many imports of rest of world goods will require export health certificates or phytosanitary certificates. Inspections of certain rest of world goods imports will align with levels set out in relevant EU legislation.

This means some goods that are not currently subject to routine inspection when imported from a rest of world country into Great Britain will need to be inspected once the agreement is implemented from mid-2027. For example, products of animal origin and certain citrus fruits.

Alignment with the EU on inspection rates and processes will mean the inspection approach changes to individual inspection rates for documentary, identity and physical checks for animal products. This is as opposed to the current Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) approach, which provides a singular combined inspection rate for identity and physical checks.

For rest of world goods that are transhipped at an EU port before being imported into Great Britain, our assumption is that checks will be required on entry to Great Britain at rest of world inspection rates per commodity type.

The UK will remain an independent trading nation and will continue to respect our international obligations as a member of the World Trade Organisation and the Three Sisters Agreements.

Importing and exporting

The new SPS agreement is relevant to all businesses and organisations involved in importing and exporting SPS goods between the UK, EU and the rest of the world.

For trade between Great Britain and the EU, the SPS agreement will reduce the requirements for routine SPS documentation and controls. The requirements for export health certificates, phytosanitary certificates and routine border checks for most agrifood goods will be removed. Alignment with EU rules will mean there will be alignment with the EU's approach to checks on rest of world SPS trade. Requirements for trade with countries outside the EU will also continue to apply, in line with international rules.

Customs controls will remain.

Great Britain to Northern Ireland movements

Under the SPS agreement, most agrifood goods will not need routine SPS certificates, checks and paperwork when moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

This will mean export health certificates and phytosanitary certificates, and the checks and controls associated with them, will no longer be required.

This will apply to all products that can be moved into the EU, which will include all food for processing, many retail products and, for example, plants for planting, seeds, and used agricultural and forestry machinery. The final restrictions on the movement of certain tree species will disappear.

The Windsor Framework will continue to apply, addressing Northern Ireland's unique circumstances and safeguarding the Good Friday Agreement. This facilitates Northern Ireland's dual market access to both the UK internal market and the EU single market.

In practice, the movement schemes set up under the Windsor Framework should no longer be needed, other than potentially for a limited number of goods not covered by the agreement.

Early considerations for your business

To prepare for the UK-EU SPS agreement, you can now take the following steps:

- sign up for Defra email alerts and the SPS readiness mailing list to receive the latest updates
- check whether the SPS agreement is likely to apply to your business, especially if you produce, handle, move or trade animals, animal products, plants, plant products, food or feed
- review your current supply chains and movements (including domestic movements and movements from Great Britain to Northern Ireland) to understand where SPS requirements may apply
- consider where your business currently follows EU rules and where you may have diverged since EU Exit
- speak to relevant partners (for example suppliers, customers, hauliers, vets or certification bodies) about potential future changes
- check with trusted sector organisations or trade bodies for any sector specific advice and updates

Exceptions

The EU has accepted there will need to be areas where the UK will retain its own rules, as set out in the May 2025 Common Understanding. Details of these are subject to the ongoing negotiation.

The government has been clear about the importance of being able to:

- set high animal welfare standards
- support public health
- support the use of new and innovative technologies

Further information will be provided following the completion of the negotiations.

What happens next

It is our intention that the agreement will take effect in mid-2027. Some detailed requirements and exact timings of when arrangements will change are still being finalised as part of ongoing negotiations.

Defra will continue to work with the sector to help shape future communications, guidance and support as further detail becomes available. We have set up an SPS Readiness Business Advisory Council, which is now meeting regularly. The council includes major trade associations and businesses.

The following timeline sets out the expected stages for introducing the SPS agreement and when further information will be published:

- summer 2026 – further details on upcoming changes announced, including on any exceptions and transition periods
- autumn 2026 – detailed guidance and support, including checklists and practical tools, made available
- mid-2027 – agreement takes effect (subject to negotiations)

Further information will be provided following the completion of negotiations.

Stay informed

We will continue to publish updates as further detail is confirmed. To keep up to date, you can:

- sign up for Defra email alerts and the SPS readiness mailing list
- engage with your trade body or industry association for sector-specific updates, where relevant

You can also get additional support from other government agencies if you are a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME). Contact:

- Department for Business and Trade: Ask our export support team at the Department for Business and Trade a question
- Food Standards Agency: Regulated products application guidance